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WILLIAM PENN'S PHILADELPHIA – *in* 1840

DR. CONRAD NEWTON LAUER

A Newcomen Address

"Were American Newcomen to do naught else, our work is well done if we succeed in sharing with America a strengthened inspiration to continue the struggle towards a nobler Civilization—through wider knowledge and understanding of the hopes, ambitions, and deeds of leaders in the past who have upheld Civilization's material progress. As we look backward, let us look forward."

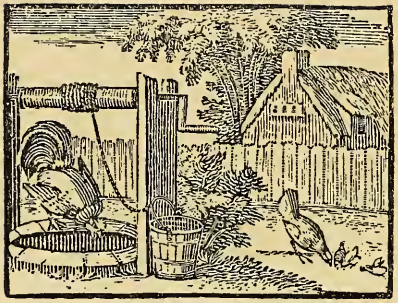
—CHARLES PENROSE
Senior Vice President
for North America
The Newcomen Society
of England

This statement, crystallizing a broad purpose of the Society, was first read at the Newcomen Meeting at New York World's Fair on August 5, 1939, when American Newcomen were guests of The British Government

WILLIAM PENN'S PHILADELPHIA —IN 1840

"It is my suggestion that we permit ourselves, during brief minutes, to turn back History's pages *just 100 years*. Immediately, we see before our eyes *a picturesque panorama of the Port of Philadelphia;* in a scene of bustling activity: ships, shipyards, counting-houses, docks, warehouses. Trade from the Seven Seas comes to Philadelphia's waterfront—in 1840. *During brief minutes, let us become part of that life and activity!*"

—Conrad Newton Lauer



"*Philadelphia in 1840:* Perhaps the pleasantest sights of all to meet our eyes are the trim houses with neat fences and well-kept gardens; the brick paths, between rows of English box, extending from sidewalk to colonial doorway; the family pump near to kitchen door; and the colorful October foliage of Philadelphia's trees which arch the roadways and cobblestone streets. Little wonder that Benjamin Franklin found such beauty here, now more than a century ago, when he arrived at Philadelphia—in October 1723."

—Conrad Newton Lauer

THE NEWCOMEN SOCIETY
AMERICAN BRANCH

WILLIAM PENN'S PHILADELPHIA —*in* 1840

By

DR. CONRAD NEWTON LAUER
Member of The Newcomen Society
President
The Philadelphia Gas Works Company
Past-President
American Gas Association
Past-President
The American Society of Mechanical Engineers

A Newcomen Address

1940

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CONRAD NEWTON LAUER

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The Newcomen Society, as a body, is not responsible for opinions expressed in the following pages

First Printing: October 1940

This Newcomen Address, based upon authoritative contemporary sources, was delivered on the occasion of the "1940 Philadelphia Luncheon" of The Newcomen Society of England, held in Dr. Lauer's honor, at the Rittenhouse Club in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on October 16, 1940

SET UP, PRINTED AND BOUND
IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AT
THE PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Newcomen Society of England

The Newcomen Society of England *was founded at London shortly after the First World War, to encourage and promote research and study of material History, that of Material Civilization, including the history of: Industry, Transportation, Communication, the Utilities, Mining, Economics, Finance, and Banking. Engineering provides a basis for these human activities.*

With headquarters at The Science Museum, South Kensington, in London, the British membership includes industrialists, engineers, physicists, educators, historians, and technologists distinguished for their services in various parts of The British Empire.

The Society takes its name from Thomas Newcomen (1663-1729), the British Engineer, whose valuable contributions in improvements to the newly invented Steam Engine brought him lasting fame in the field of the mechanic arts. Newcomen, in partnership with the famous Thomas Savery (1650-1715), developed the Newcomen Engines, whose period of use was from 1712 to 1775. It was in 1764, while working on a model of Newcomen's engine, that James Watt first conceived the idea of a condensing engine: the Watt Engine.

The "Transactions" of The Newcomen Society, issued annually at London, constitute an unique and most valuable contribution to the history of Material Civilization. These annual volumes find their way to technical and university libraries throughout the World.

In 1923, through the initiative and efforts of The American Founder, the late L. F. Loree of New York, aided by a small group of well-known American industrialists, bankers, railroad presidents, historians, engineers, and educators, there was founded the American Branch of The Newcomen Society of England. The American Newcomen has its headquarters in those of The American Society of Mechanical Engineers at New York, one of whose officers is the Joint Honorary Corresponding Secretary for North America, in Newcomen Society.

Two principal events in the yearly program of American Newcomen are: the Annual American Dinner at New York, held simultaneously with the British Dinner at London and with exchange of cable greetings; and the "National Pilgrimage" to points of historic interest concerned with the beginnings of industry, or transportation, or the mechanic arts in America. Papers presented at the Annual Dinners are read simultaneously at London and New York.

A collateral objective of American Newcomen is to provide another informal link in the friendly and intimate relations between the United States and Great Britain. American Newcomen has three Honorary Members.

American Newcomen comprises in its membership many American leaders in the fields of finance, industry, transportation, communication, the utilities, history, science, engineering, university education, and technology. The Newcomen Society of England enjoys international reputation in the value of its papers and meetings, which are based upon exhaustive scientific research in these special fields of History.

APR 11 1969

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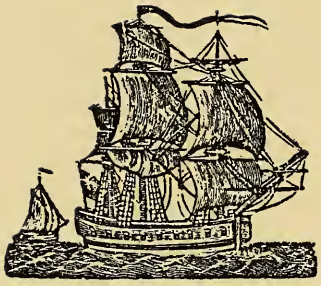

"TODAY's informal notes, based upon contemporary sources, may give you something of a thumb-nail sketch of the wholesome life of a self-respecting American city of a century ago.

"My own predominant impression of *Philadelphia in 1840* is of her stability and her dignity."

—CONRAD NEWTON LAUER

Biographical Sketch of The Author

"One of America's most useful Citizens!" might rights fully be applied to the author of this Newcomen Addres-on "Philadelphia in 1840." Few Americans have had equal breadth of opportunity to know Industry; to know the Utilities; to know and serve their fellow man and to understand him—as has had Dr. Conrad Newton Lauer *of Philadelphia. During over 35 years, his was daily, intimate contact with industrial production and management. As Vice-President of Day & Zimmermann, Inc., his responsibilities extended to almost infinite variety of professional work throughout the United States and in Europe. Since 1929, he has served as President of The Philadelphia Gas Works Company. Is Vice-President of The United Gas Improvement Company. His interests extend to finance, education, philanthropy, history, authorship. Member of numerous boards: Baldwin Locomotive Works; Baldwin-Southwark Corporation; I. P. Morris & De La Vergne, Inc.; Sharp & Dohme, Inc.; Midvale Steel Company; and others. Formerly, Trustee of Worcester Polytechnic Institute. Trustee of Stevens Institute of Technology. Associate Trustee of the University of Pennsylvania. Recipient of honorary degree in Engineering as recognition of lifework. Member of Board of Managers, The Franklin Institute of Pennsylvania. Member, The Vermilye Medal Committee. Past-President, American Gas Association. Past-President, The American Society of Mechanical Engineers. Founder of The Hoover Medal. Cyrus Fogg Brackett Lecturer at Princeton University. Secretary of The Guild of Brackett Lecturers (Princeton, New*

Jersey). Member of leading technical, scientific, and historical societies. Has rendered outstanding contributions to the cause of Engineering in the United States. Served many years as Vestryman in the Episcopal Church. Identified with civic and charitable institutions. Author: "Engineering in American Industry"; "John Ericsson: Engineer: 1803-1889." Is Chairman of the Philadelphia Committee, in The Newcomen Society of England.

WILLIAM PENN'S PHILADELPHIA —*in* 1840

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, had you chanced to be alive in America and to glance at arrival notices for the Port of Philadelphia as printed in William Fry's "*National Gazette and Literary Register*," published at No. 71, South Second Street, "Terms: One Year, Five Dollars, to be paid in advance," you would have received this marine intelligence:

> "*Arrived:* Ship *John Sergeant*, Van Dycke master, from Liverpool, September 8, consigned to J. G. & D. B. Stacey, merchandize. Spoke, October 1st, ship *General Hamilton*, of Providence, from Havre, bound to Providence, in lat 42, lon 45. Also spoke off Cape Clear, September 14, ship *Shaw*, Davis, from Liverpool for Portsmouth. The *Sergeant* brings files of London papers to the 4th September, Lloyd's Lists, Price Currents, &c.
>
> "The report of the loss of the whale ship *John Adams*, of Nantucket, is entirely without foundation. Letters have been received from her, dated on the 10th August, off the Isle of May, ship in good order and all hands well. On the 19th of the preceding month, struck a large whale, had a boat upset, and lost a man, the cook. A man deserted from the ship at one of the Western Islands, and it is undoubtedly from him that the letters were received that gave rise to the story."

Philadelphia, in 1840, definitely was *sea-minded*. Her commerce and trade extended to far-off lands; her mer-

chants from their counting-houses sent Philadelphia captains and Philadelphia crews upon voyages to many an ocean; rich cargoes came to Philadelphia's docks. Her ships outrode many a storm. Indeed, The Province of Pennsylvania had been at the forefront, in the days of colonial shipping and navigation. Philadelphia, definitely, was sea-minded. Salt water was splashed across many a page of Philadelphia's shipping ledgers.

Nor were Philadelphia's citizens, in 1840, lacking of interest in affairs overseas. Victoria, only child of the late Duke of Kent, had ascended England's throne just three years previously. Louis Philippe ruled in Paris. Five years before, in July 1835, had this French King narrowly escaped death by Fieschi's infernal machine when twelve persons were killed and forty wounded. Philadelphia had gasped at the news.

Eight years were elapsed since the dread Cholera Epidemic had visited North America and taken heavy toll at Philadelphia. Three years previously, the Panic of 1837 had shaken the country.

It was nine years before, on December 26, 1831, that Philadelphia had lost by death her great merchant, banker, and philanthropist, Stephen Girard, the native of Bordeaux who became Philadelphia's outstanding citizen. He it was who, in 1814, had subscribed for 95 per cent of the United States Government's war loan of $5,000,000—then an immense sum. Stephen Girard's name was known in many lands.

Philadelphians, in 1840, still talked of Stephen Girard: of his ships, their cargoes, and his dramatic rise to fame and wealth and usefulness.

Philadelphians, too, talked of Daniel Webster, who moved a nation by his oratory and who, the next year, in

1841, was destined to become Secretary of State. Webster —who so often in those days was called: "The Defender of the Constitution."

We should recall that news travelled slowly, in 1840. It was not until four years later that Samuel F. B. Morse, in 1844, opened his historic telegraph line between Washington and Baltimore with funds appropriated by Congress.

I have said that Philadelphia was sea-minded. Philadelphia had shown keen interest in a daring exploit two years previous, in April 1838, when Atlantic navigation by steam was begun by the little 700-ton British wooden paddlewheeler "*Sirius*" in her epic voyage from London to New York. An event which deeply touched, by its international significance, the same Daniel Webster.

So it is that we find *Philadelphia* substantial, loyally American, thrifty, and cultured—*during these crisp days of October 1840*, exactly one hundred years ago, when Martin Van Buren of New York sat in the White House as 8th President, when canals, highways, and the new trail of the iron horse were being pushed forward, and when the "Winning of the West" was upon many tongues! There were romance, adventure, and daring in America—in the 40's.

In order that we may obtain something of a closeup view of the *Philadelphia of 1840*, I propose, *Mr. Chairman*, that we permit ourselves to be found standing upon the deck of that stout vessel mentioned at the outset of these remarks, transatlantic passengers bound for Philadelphia.

We are aboard the good Ship *John Sergeant*, just a hundred years ago this morning, as her master, Captain Van Dycke, is sailing up the Delaware to tie up at his dock and be greeted by Messrs. J. G. and D. B. Stacey, distinguished Philadelphia merchants to whom his cargo of British goods is consigned.

It is well for us to recall that we left Liverpool on September 8th and with fair winds have crossed a broad Atlantic to Philadelphia in *39 days*. It is unlikely our Captain will tell us how, not long ago, the London packet ship "*Philadelphia*" Captain Champlin, made the voyage from Portsmouth to New York in the amazingly short time of *25 days* for a westbound passage. Well, 39 days is not so bad; perhaps acceptable to Philadelphians!

❦ ❦

What a pleasant sight greets our eyes from the broad deck: *Philadelphia in 1840*.

Everywhere alongshore is evidence of human activity. At the many shipyards, Pennsylvania's celebrated oak is being fashioned into ships. We see sail-lofts; ropewalks; warehouses; basins; docks; slips; wharves; piers. Servants of the Sea are important folk here.

Along the waterfront: shops; inns; taverns; counting-houses. Ships berthed after long voyages from the Seven Seas. Ships loading for foreign ports. Ships moored in the river. Ships at wharfside. Masts everywhere. Canvas drying in the autumn sunshine. A smell of tar and naval stores. Men in the rigging, bending new sails. The splash of oars in whaleboats, as we glide upstream. Surely the rattle of anchor chains is music to Philadelphia.

Perhaps the pleasantest sights of all to meet our eyes are the trim houses with neat fences and well-kept gardens; the brick paths, between rows of English box, extending from sidewalk to colonial doorway; the family pump near to kitchen door; and the colorful October foliage of Philadelphia's trees which arch the roadways and cobblestone streets. The horse-block and hitching-post are household necessities—symbols of horse and rider.

Little wonder that Benjamin Franklin found such beauty here, now more than a century ago, when he arrived at Philadelphia—in October 1723. He, too, sailed the Delaware in Autumn. He, too, wrote of his impressions.

Philadelphia, as presently we survey her waterfront and city, has dignity, charm, beauty. The voyage from Liverpool has brought us to a garden spot; our 39 days aboard tossing ship are not spent in vain. The haven where we would be rewards us for a long voyage. We find ourselves arrived in a God-fearing community where American Liberty was born; where men look each other straight in the eyes—in this Year of Grace 1840.

We have been vouchsafed a sight which will live in recollection—will be fresh across a span of ten decades.

Our ship now docked, we bid leave of our Captain whose seamanship has brought us through wind and wave—and we return, *Mr. Chairman*, to comfortable quarters in a Newcomen surrounding, at Philadelphia's Rittenhouse Club *of 1940*. Still it is October; still we have benefit of Autumn's sunshine.

But before I conclude this informal review dated back a Century, I beg leave to share with you certain contemporary Philadelphia newspaper items, notices, and advertisements which may prove not wholly without interest nor lacking entertainment:

The first is the leading editorial found in "*The National Gazette*," published at Philadelphia, in the issue of November 24, 1840. It speaks for itself:

> "The question of the precise duration of the Presidential Term for a longer or shorter period is, of all others connected with national politics, the one most demanding the attention of the public mind, so that a fair and earnest consideration of the subject may lead to such a definite understanding and practice in relation to it as that past errors and evils may be avoided, and the fullest amount of future good secured. The American people are indebted to General Jackson for the first officially promulgated theory of the Single Presidential Term. They will be indebted to General Harrison for the first voluntary official practice of the same. The public sense has been expressed clearly in favor of a *single* presidential term. The duplicate term may now be considered exploded."

The second reference is to a leading article on the front page of the "*Public Ledger and Daily Transcript*" for Friday morning, October 16, 1840, one hundred years ago this morning. It reads:

> "(*Reported for the Public Ledger.*)
>
> "EXHIBITION OF THE FRANKLIN INSTITUTE
>
> "The turmoil and business attending on the present political contest, having been so far disposed of, we renew our daily notices, of this interesting exhibition, which for the last few days we were necessarily obliged to dispense with."

There follows, in the old newspaper, an extensive recital of those marvels of Science and the Mechanic Arts which The Franklin Institute of Pennsylvania, then at the elderly age of 16 years, was displaying to an eager public. The recital is too extensive for me to quote in full; but I give you these few samples: "*Special exhibition of patchwork quilts*, with roses and rosebuds." Another: "*Beautiful satin gaiters for ladies*, tastefully displayed." Yet another: "*No. 1037. A velocipede, by E. W. Bushnell*, intended at once for amusement and exercise for children; it may be propelled with great swiftness, and is entitled to the attention of parents."

I should be remiss, *Gentlemen*, in my responsibilities as an historian, were I to neglect to report to you upon *two other items* included in the "*Public Ledger's*" roster of scientific exhibits under auspices of Philadelphia's great Museum. The items are these: "*No. 225.*—Indian rubber neck collars," and "*Shoe Exhibit.*—One of the shoes exhibited has contained water ever since the opening of this mechanical display at the Institute, and has not leaked yet."

Perusal of these old newspapers discloses that Philadelphia's crowds crammed the Institute's Museum to the doors. In fact, a hazard arose. Whereupon, the "*Public Ledger*" in the same issue of October 16, 1840 wrote an editorial, warning the populace by the following words of well-considered counsel:

> "*Pickpockets.*—Persons visiting the exhibition of the Franklin Institute had better be on look out for pickpockets; a number of persons have already been fleeced by these worthies. The crowded state of the different rooms facilitates their thieving designs."

I give you a final reference to Philadelphia's press of 1840. Philadelphians read a great deal. Bookshops and bookstalls and book notices receive mention in every issue. Authors abounded. The reference may especially interest certain Newcomen Members present here today: that a "best-seller" for October 1840 was the following book, whose notice is quoted to you verbatim:

> "*Two Years and a Half in the Navy*, or Journal of a Cruise in the Mediterranean and Levant, on Board of the U.S. Frigate *Constellation*, in the years 1829-30-31, by E. C. Wines. Also just received: *Pride and Prejudice*."

History plays strange tricks of repetition—even after 100 years!

And so, *Mr. Chairman*, we take leave of *Philadelphia in 1840*, with its shipyards, and shipping, its wharves, its taverns, its newspapers, its trim houses with fenced gardens—all of these symbols of industry, thrift, culture, happiness, poise, and contentment.

Today's informal notes may have given you something of a thumb-nail sketch of the wholesome life of a self-respecting American city of a century ago. My own predominant impression of *Philadelphia in 1840* is of her stability and her dignity.

Cannot we profitably take these same two qualities into the bosom of our American Life, *this critical Year of 1940?* America can find good use for morale.

THE END

The "1940 Philadelphia Luncheon," held in Dr. Lauer's honor, during which this Address was delivered at the Rittenhouse Club in Philadelphia on October 16, 1940, was under direction of American Newcomen's permanent Philadelphia Committee, whose roster is given on the following pages:

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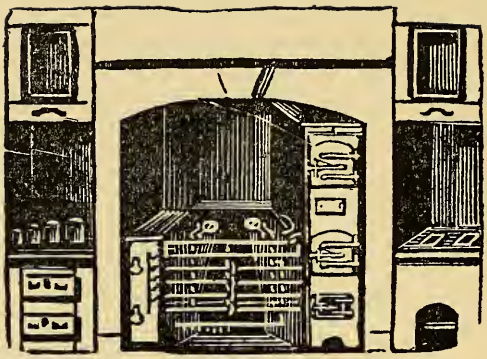
Chairman, Historical Advisory Committee,
American Branch, The Newcomen Society



"WILLIAM PENN, in 1682, founded Philadelphia upon ideals and traditions. The family and family life, *in men's own homes*, were to be the center of the life of the colony: namely, that of The Province of Pennsylvania.

"We find Philadelphia in 1840 adhering to these ideals and traditions. We find contentment in Philadelphia's homes of 1840; we find self-discipline there—and self-reliance. Hard work was not absent.

"Philadelphia's conservatism has been a bulwark against trends upsetting to those ways of living which are an essence of Americanism. The Liberty Bell first rang at Philadelphia. Its echoes have meaning to us today; and a challenge. Philadelphia in 1840 we find meeting that challenge. It is fitting that we, in 1940, fail not. Tradition stabilizes. Tradition interprets. Tradition can inspire. We need inspiration."

—CONRAD NEWTON LAUER

"The roads you travel so briskly lead out of dim antiquity, and you study the past chiefly because of its bearing on the living present and its promise for the future."

—Major General James G. Harbord, K.C.M.G., D.S.M., U.S. Army (*Ret.*)
American Member of Council at London, The Newcomen Society

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